

Maennerchor Singing Society Hall
1313-15 2nd Avenue
Fourth Ward Neighborhood
Altoona
Blair County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5825

HABS,
PA,
7-ALTO,
63-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MAENNERCHOR SINGING SOCIETY HALL

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Location: 1313-15 2nd Avenue

Date of Erection: ca. 1890, altered 1903

Description: This two-and-a-half-story, gable-front double house, unlike most in the area, is set up on the hill and back from the avenue property line, with the rear of the building reaching the alley. Currently sided with aluminum on a wood frame, the house is almost entirely without ornament; it has no cornice or chimneys and minimal window surrounds. Two central side-by-side doors provide access to each half; there is a window to each side, four windows that line up across the second floor and a single window in the third directly centered below the roof ridge.

The building is unusually small for a double house on this size lot (see 210-212 14th St., HABS No. PA-5865, for comparison). This, coupled with the unusual relationship of the roof-pitch to width, belie the fact that it was originally built as a meeting hall. It was converted to a double house in 1903.

History: The early history of the Maennerchor Hall/Schwartz House is closely connected with the ethnic German component of the Fourth Ward community. In October 1882 a group called the Maennerchor Singing Society purchased a 50' x 120' lot from John and Emma Wright for \$600. In tax records the Maennerchor Hall first appeared in 1890, assessed at \$2,000. Although it was not listed in 1893, an 1898-99 city directory listed the Maennerchor Hall without street number on the south side of 2nd Avenue between 13th and 14th streets. On the 1894 Sanborn map the structure was designated as a chapel.

The Maennerchor Singing Society apparently experienced financial difficulties,¹ as the property was sold through a sheriff's deed poll on July 1, 1901, to the Teutonia Loan and Building Association. By October, Teutonia passed the property on to Leonhard Schwartz for \$1,200; at that time the property contained a "large one-story frame building used as a Hall and known as the Maennerchor Singing Society Hall."

Tax records suggest that Leonhard Schwartz, a tailor, quickly converted the standing structure into a double house. In 1902 he was assessed for owning "1 lot & old building" at \$1,000, "old manecoir ball." The 1903 tax book shows this same entry crossed out in pencil with the words "changed over the building inside" written in. By 1904, Schwartz was taxed for a lot and double house worth \$2,200. Also by 1904, he had taken up residence here, with an address listed as 1313 2nd Ave. In 1912-13, other listed inhabitants were Charles Schwartz, a baker, and Paul Schwartz, a wrapper at Peightal's Bread Bakery. In 1915, Leonard was a farmer, Charles, a baker, and Paul, a student.

The house was again sold through a sheriff's sale on October 25, 1933, this time to the Standard Building and Loan Association, which probably used the house as a rental property. Liquidating trustees sold the property to Erma A. and David E. Omlor for \$1 in 1949. The Omlors lived at No. 1315 while David worked as a watchman for the PRR; in 1951 they rented No. 1313 to Millie Gray, a widow, and to Erma M. DeBernardis and her husband, Joseph, who worked as a knitter at Puritan Knitting Mills.

In January 1953, the house and lot became the property of Joseph E. and Della A. Shoenfelt for \$4,300. Twenty years later, the property was acquired by Improved Dwellings for Altoona, Inc., a non-profit organization, for a nominal fee. They sold one side of the double house to its present owners and still retain the other.

¹ The Maennerchor society still exists and is now affiliated with Altoona's Bavarian Hall.

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Sources: Maps: 1882, 1894. Deed books: 59/87, 132/308, 321/88-90, 372/497, 415/519, 602/490, 670/9, 945/36, 961/1100. City Directories. Tax assessment records.

Project Information: This report was part of a larger project to document the city of Altoona, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), Randy Cooley, director. Overviews of the history of the city (HABS No. PA-5784) and the fourth ward neighborhood (HABS No. PA-5786) provide context for these buildings as well as a comprehensive list of sources. See also additional HABS reports on buildings in the city and other neighborhoods.

This report was prepared by Susan Garfinkel in the summer of 1989 under the supervision of HABS senior historian Alison K. Hoagland and Kim E. Wallace, supervisory historian. Garfinkel's and other project historians' work was published as Railroad City: Four Historic Neighborhoods in Altoona, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1990), edited by Kim E. Wallace, supervisory historian, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.